DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 423 JC 900 257

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TITLE Leadership Practice: How I Raised One Hundred Thousand Dollars This Year with No Fund Raising Experience.
PUB DATE May 90
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Corporate Support; *Fund Raising; Grants; Participative Decision Making; Personal Narratives; *Private Financial Support; *School Business Relationship; *School Community Relationship; School Funds; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

In one year, with no prior experience, the Chair of the Art Department at a large community college raised over $100,000 to help the department expand its programs and to build relationships within the school and community. The motivation behind the $100,000 fund-raising goal came from the chairperson's desire to develop her leadership skills. The first sum of money, $7,500, was donated by an Art Alliance group to initiate, at the faculty's request, a one-day artist-in-residence program featuring younger and mid-career artists. The next $22,000 came from a commercial developer who was interested in a mural project for a construction site. The developer purchased a construction mural that had been done earlier in a similar project for a non-profit organization. The project resulted in good art, television and newspaper coverage, and new relationships within the public and private sectors. Finally, $75,000 was raised for the college's sculpture garden. This project was perceived as part of the college's mission and goals and the donation came from extensive dealings with a single donor. These experiences exemplify five principles relevant to the professional person interested in volunteer fund raising: (1) be an innovative leader, but work within the context of the mission and goals of the college; (2) keep ego out of the fund-raising efforts, but keep passion for the project apparent; (3) relate to potential donors, do not pontificate; (4) choose projects carefully and follow through; and (5) do not be afraid to try fund raising, in spite of inexperience. (VVC)

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Leadership Practice: How I Raised One Hundred Thousand Dollars This Year With No Fund Raising Experience

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With no prior experience in development, I raised over $100,000. But not all at once; I had to practice and work up to it; first $7,500, then $22,000, and finally $75,000.

I have no wealthy close friends and had never raised any money before becoming the Art Department Chair at a large community college four years ago. The total sum of my fund raising experience the first three years was seeking a few scholarships, writing a ten thousand dollar grant that was funded for one thousand, getting some paint for a mural, and organizing an artist in residence program partially funded by the college foundation. In each case the money value was modest, but the experience was important.

There is limited useful literature on fund raising. Some pertains to philanthropy itself, some specifically to colleges, and some mentions leadership as a central theme. A recent issue of Daedalus (Pifer, 1987, p. 130) points out that philanthropic contributions are far more important to institutional budgets than their size because they provide a margin for innovation essential to maintain a free and open society. It is a statement that illustrates the pivotal importance of developing fund raising leadership in the community college. Jeremiah Ryan cites a number of studies which indicate the most important factor in an institution's fund raising is a committed and active president (Ryan, p. 9) and I am lucky enough to be at an institution with a modern and capable president to observe. One important thought

that reoccurs in a broad collection of essays by two-year college presidents is "Do not pursue funds if there is no interest on the part of others" (Mutzel, p. 6). "One should pursue main stream goals" (Mutzel, p. 14). Those goals should be "consistent with the mission and goals of the college" (Mutzel, p. 24). This was a lesson I had to learn. The value of philanthropy and the cautions may be more recognized than H. Gerald Quigg's (p. 4) observation that "While money is the primary focus of capital campaign efforts...leadership is the major new resource." He adds "the new leadership discovered in this way often has a greater value to the institution than the dollars raised." As a relatively new administrator with my department now running well, my main motivation for setting myself a $100,000 fund raising goal had to do with seeking new opportunities to develop my leadership skills.

After the department store has been minded, an academic chairperson has opportunities to go beyond management. One has a title, direct access to upper administration, and the autonomy. There is little risk in seeking outside funds because it is an extra, not a measure of how well you are doing your job. However, fund raising is a performance so you have to practice.

The greatest risk for the department chair is in undertaking the wrong thing. When I first took my current position, $13,000 was more or less in place for a one week artist in residence program. I decided to stage it as publicly as possible and this

success helped assure support for the following years because positive visibility attracts funds.

However, high energy activities are exhausting. It is tempting to seek expediency by cutting back on consulting with the very people the project was originally designed to served. While a committee nominates the artists for the residency and letters are sent to them all, the choice usually comes down to who I follow up and persuade. I have taken the advice of the person who had founded the program, which happens to mean that the selected people are excellent artists, but they do not represent the more conceptual interest of many faculty and students. I am able to get generous press and full campus and community involvement, but still relatively little department participation. Thus, I have to do most of the work and in the middle of the crowds, I feel I have given a party where no one has come. Raising funds without the strong interest of those who will "benefit" can give new meaning to the phrase "an embarrassment of riches."

Early one morning shortly after the completion of the last week-long artist in residency, a faculty spokesperson stood in my office doorway and said "some of us would love to have something like a one day artist in residence program featuring younger and mid-career artists representing a number of our discipline areas." What I heard was faculty choice and existing program relevance. I suggested we write a short grant proposal together and send it to the Art Alliance group who already

provided us with a scholarship. Faculty developed the idea to meet their teaching goals, and when we were successful, they made the specific choices. That was the first $7,500 I raised this year. Students and faculty jammed the events, the quality and variety was exciting, and a good time was had by all.

The next $22,000 I raised also related to previous planning experience. Last year a non-profit community institution called to ask if I had a student who could " decorate" a construction fence. The job was too big for any one person and art students are not "decorators," but I explored the possibility of offering a class on mural painting. I asked if they would pay for paint and whether the college could auction off the panels when construction was over. While that was checked with their foundation, I ascertained my faculty was interested in art in public places and with their support I then persuaded a famous muralist to teach the class. The project resulted in good art and I was able to obtain television and newspaper coverage as a way of repaying the artist for his generous contribution.

Just as the artist did far more than he needed to do, so did the institution that had the fence on their site. To fuel this enthusiasm I suggested we split any profits from the future auction. This did insure continuing vital support, but when the stakes get high, things get tricky, especially when nothing is in writing. At a certain point the other institution started to assume the entire auction would be theirs so my college's

foundation director wrote a letter of understanding. Their foundation director indicated she preferred dealing with me. My inexperience was probably appealing. That's no shame, as long as you know enough to get help and learn that the next time it is better to have something in writing. Friendly confirming letters will do.

Meanwhile, the community does find the project special and publicity emphasizes the wonderful cooperative relationship between the institutions. A local congressman even presented my president and theirs with a proclamation. You have succeeded in your institutional leadership when the president, and not you, receives the recognition. What you earn is skill and the trust of administration to let you try further. That is enabling. You can build on that just as you can on your practice.

This year a commercial developer wanted a similar project to create good will after alienating preservationists and local businessmen with a long stalled restoration project. The first mural was now ready to be auctioned, but we were having second thoughts about who would want such large panels and also about dealing with the other institution. Thus, I took the artist's suggestion of trying to get the developer of the new project to buy some of the old one as part of the proposed mural. I made it clear what they were really buying was the expertise to get the mural done. Still, they wanted to pay a fraction of the twenty-five thousand dollars I wanted as department funds, payment for the art director, supplies and the piece of fence. I asked our

foundation director if the college wanted me to accept even though I didn't think the price was equal to the effort the project would take to see through. No one pushed me and pressure by the community on the developer meant time was on our side. Two months later, after protracted negotiations via fax, the foundation got a check for $22,000, six of which we sent to the institution that had originally been our "partner." A kind letter from them acknowledged the successful conclusion. A detailed fax, followed by the original, documents all the details of the project we are starting.

Finally, the $75,000 I have just raised for a college sculpture garden for our growing artist in residence collection is the largest single gift the college has ever received. It means I have succeeded in raising over $100,000 in seven months of trying. The first funds were obtained through a grant, the second through entrepreneurial negotiations, and this most recent effort is the result of obtaining a major gift through participation in the college's first capital campaign.

A faculty member was on a committee for the new library and had been advocating a sculpture garden. The idea was something I cared about and something that related to my position as Art Department Chair. I also saw the project as an opportunity to learn about seeking the major gift. Such activity must have institutional approval, so the first step was working with the foundation to have the project become part of a list of the

capital campaign's "commemorative opportunities." This ensured that the sculpture garden was perceived as part of the college's mission and goals.

The potential of individual major donors is largely untested in community colleges (CASE p. 22) and are only limited by imagination (CASE p. 23). Fund raising is often called "friend raising" and phrases like "people give to people, not institutions" are common. As Stanford University's President Donald Kennedy said while speaking of his current successful 1.1 billion ahead-of-target campaign, " we need to find the few people for a project who can "see this vision and respond" (The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 4, 1990, p. 35). This is the unique challenge of working with an individual or private foundation. A vision is conveyed through a relationship and this means spending a great deal of emotional labor as well as obligating the time and effort to then see the vision through. Money is not free. A volunteer committed to a project is willing to pay a price the paid professional cannot.

This is how I did it on my first try. I called someone I had not seen for several years and asked about a friend of his I met only once over twenty-five years ago. I was given a home phone number and I made the cold call to invite this person to lunch. Then, fearing sins of both omission and commission, I asked the professional fund raisers what I should and shouldn't do. I wanted to be professional.

I remember some of the advice. Find out how the corporate

entities mesh. Stay away from specifics. Don't accept a small gift too quickly. Say how much we have already raised. Mention a number of the commemorative opportunities. Say how much I love the college. Keep it lofty. I even wrote down some phrases like "Is there any way you could guide me in ultimately working towards gaining the support of your foundation?" and "If interested, I could get you together with the people who could present the project to you."

Nothing went as planned. Mid-way through salads, I slipped my packet onto the table and started into the presentation. A few moments later, my guest asked for the rest of his lunch packed up to go, adding that his foundation likes to fund the vision of individuals to do something meaningful for their lives, not institutions who may likely not see the specific project through as presented

I had approached the project as an interesting extension of my job, and as an idea that was novel for a community college. As an administrator, I had tried to suppress personal feelings because I didn't want conflict between my ideas and those who were already thinking about it in the department. I tried to concern myself with just raising the funds, not with the details of how they were spent.

Suddenly I realized I would have to cast off my institutional and even departmental hat. I really did want this sculpture garden, and if it took being personal to seek it, I was

willing for I could be completely honest. Although it was known, I cleared the slate by confessing I certainly wasn't a professional fund raiser. I was told that was much in my favor. With that encouragement, I talked about the impact of my first contact with art in a sculpture garden, my history of commitment to art in public places and my desire to make art accessible to those who might not go to museums. He asked me what I wanted him to do. I pulled some sheets out of the fund raising packet and pointed to the college master plan, noting there was no place labeled sculpture garden, although it was listed as a $75,000 "commemorative opportunity." I consciously said the sum of money. I asked for a letter indicating our meeting had been a good one. I said, "let me see if I can get the garden on the plans and then let me come back and ask you to make it possible." The winter sun was low when luncheon ended.

The letter indicated that because they funded individuals, our meeting was more than a formality. The foundation director and I took this to the vice president and a month later the Board of Trustees approved $35,000 in master plan money for designing a plaza that would include a sculpture garden. Informally, I kept in touch with my potential donor. At the college I became part of the committee for this space, and after an initial generic plan and a revision that made convincing moves toward my vision, I asked the potential donor to campus. In my last effort to share the project, I went about setting up a foundation team meeting, but he asked that I do the presentation solo. The stakes were

high and the college had to trust me. They helpfully assembled everything I needed and then left me on my own. The potential donor and I visited our art gallery and looked at some of the art we own. We walked to see the potential site, and then to the board room where I could show the progress on the plans. When I was done, I could directly face the man and say I needed the full $75,000 to make it happen.

I asked what I could do next. He suggested I write up exactly what I had said to him at the luncheon and report what had been accomplished since. I asked if he would read the statement and provide feedback before it was presented to his board. The document I wrote was only three single typed pages and probably took twenty-five hours to write. He purged the last scraps of institutional fund raising language, a board meeting was held, we had a telephone conversation, and a congratulatory letter arrived with a check.

I was lucky to work with a good and patient donor. The insight behind his intelligent questions gave me focus and brought a specific creative idea into being. Through that process he has given me the desire to see this project through. It is much more of a role than I bargained for, but it is a job worth doing.

Perhaps these stories exemplify five principles relevant to the professional person interested in volunteer fund raising. 1) Be an innovative leader, but within the context of the mission

and goals of your constituents and institution. 2) Keep your ego out of your fund raising and your passion for a good idea apparent. 3) Whether the potential donor is a group, an institution, or an individual foundation president, relate, don't pontificate. 4) Choose your projects carefully and then make no half way efforts. 5) Don't be afraid to try fund raising any more than you would be afraid to make a new friend. Giving and getting the right gift can be equally satisfying.

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JUN 21 1990